

SOVIET UNION:

ARTS & CRAFTS  
IN ANCIENT TIMES  
& TODAY





The seemingly endless expanse of the Soviet Union stretches for thousands of kilometers from the Arctic Ocean in the north to subtropical Georgia and the blazing deserts of Central Asia in the south, and extends 11,000 kilometers from Kamchatka in the east to the European borders in the west.

Within this vast territory live about 100 different national groups, each with its own language and customs, its own national cultural traditions and art. This diversity accounts for the great richness and variety one finds today in any exhibition of Soviet folk art.

The roots of Russian folk art extend back into the distant past. By the first centuries A.D., many traditions in art had already developed in areas that are now part of the Soviet Union—traditions that were later to be carried on by the young Slavic culture.

Over 2,000 years ago, on the broad steppes north of the Black Sea, there flowered the distinctive Scythian civilization, known to the ancient world through the colonization of the Greeks. As they migrated from place to place, the Scythians carried their culture all the way to the Urals and the Altai. In recent times, archaeologists have discovered rich Scythian burial places along the Dnieper, in the Crimea, the Northern Caucasus, the Kuban and the Altai.

One of the distinctive features of Scythian art is its ornamentation, using both realistic and fantastic images of animals in silhouette. The Scythian jeweller converted the bold curves of animal bodies into metal ornaments for clothing and as buckles and trappings for horses.

Ancient themes coming from the Northern Black Sea area through Byzantium, Iran and Central Asia found their way into the ornamentation styles of Old Russia. An example is the creatively adapted image of half bird, half woman, derived from the Hellenic siren, which became so firmly established in Russian folk art tradition. Century after century, these bird-maidens have appeared in stone and wood carvings, in jewelry, in paintings on wood and tile, in decorative enamels, embroidery and engravings.

Russian art, as well as the art of the other peoples of the Soviet Union, has to this day preserved the skills of antiquity.

The value of this art is in its continuity, in its having been passed on from generation to generation, with its forms being transformed from century to century, always retaining that which was aesthetically best yet the most practical for daily life.

A sensitivity to his materials; a deep understanding of their textural properties, be they gold, silver, copper, iron, wood, clay, stone or bone; the ability to work the form and surface of an object so that the beauty of the material is fully brought out; the ability to adapt the design of the technique used to the shape of the object—these are the attributes that connect the art of the Georgian hammersmiths, the Armenian jewellers, the Russian wood-, bone-, and stone-engravers, and the Ukrainian potters and needle-workers.

Characteristic of folk artists is the quiet power and expressiveness of their images and an optimism which always manifests itself in buoyant colors and fanciful ornamentation, whether it be in architectural forms, home furnishings, household utensils, clothing or jewelry.

Folk art decoration, abounding in floral patterns and an interweaving of fantasy and ordinary experience, is always rhythmic, accenting the structure, the essence of the object. The images of real or mythical animals and birds are worked into decorations of grasses and flowers, either imitating those found in nature or reflecting the artist's imagination.

Although all folk art has common characteristics, each national group of the Soviet Union and each art center in that huge country has its own distinctive flavor.

One of the basic tasks of Soviet art specialists, historians and museum workers, is that of identifying and classifying ancient objects of art. Persistent and painstaking study of artifacts and archival documents has led to the discovery of many ancient art centers. Items of applied art can frequently be differentiated not only according to the locality and time of their manufacture, but often according to the individual artists who created them.

The favorite and most widely used material in Russian folk art is wood. Wood was used for building ships and houses. Windows, gates and various architectural details were richly ornamented by wood carvings; furniture, dishes, toys and every kind of household item were made of wood. Excellent proportion, carvings and painting, frequently turned ordinary objects into works of art.

Archaeological findings in Novgorod dating back to the 10th, 11th and 12th Centuries have revealed the high artistic quality of wood carvings in that period. The custom of decorating sailing ships with wood carvings dates back to the ancient past. On the Volga, the carpenters who built ships also applied these skills to decorating their homes, no doubt explaining why one so often sees the carved figure of a mermaid decorating peasant homes.

A gentle strength flows from the compact, steady shapes of wooden utensils, outstanding among which are wooden ladles with their beautiful dark silhouettes. The shape of the latter originated many centuries ago in the northern forest zone where the many rivers and lakes were thickly populated with fowl, and where wooden boats resembling floating birds were built. Over the years, this bird-boat shape of the ladle developed and became widespread throughout the land.

Bold, at times mischievous, folk fantasy sometimes led to the adding of handles to the ladle in the form of one or two sculptured heads of horses or of some other animal with teeth bared.

Certain artisans specialized in carving wooden cake boards completely covered with rich decorations of fanciful flowers, animals, birds, or even whole towns.

One of the oldest and prettiest folk art forms—block printing on cloth—is also connected with wood. Russian and Georgian artisans made wood blocks for stamping dyes on fabrics—mainly canvas, homespun, linen and hemp.

What was demanded of these artisans was rhythmic pattern of decoration and balance of design.







Wooden spindles, which occupied an important place in both the life and art of the people, were decorated with carvings or paintings. The shape and ornamentation varied from place to place. Spindles from the Northern Dvina were painted with bright, vibrant designs and images; those from the Volga were more harmonious, and those from Yaroslavl-Kostroma had openwork carving.

Decorative painting of wooden articles was founded on ancient tradition. Spindles, furniture, utensils, chests and trunks were often painted by the very same artists who painted icons—using the same techniques, tempera and bright cinnabar.

Ancient Russian icon-painting disclosed a fantastically beautiful world of color, balance and harmony. The emotional content was expressed by the pose, hand placement and inclination of the head; certain icons conveyed an amazing dynamism and forcefulness of color.

Beautiful, graceful silhouettes and gentle harmony of color are especially characteristic of the Moscow paintings of the 15th Century.

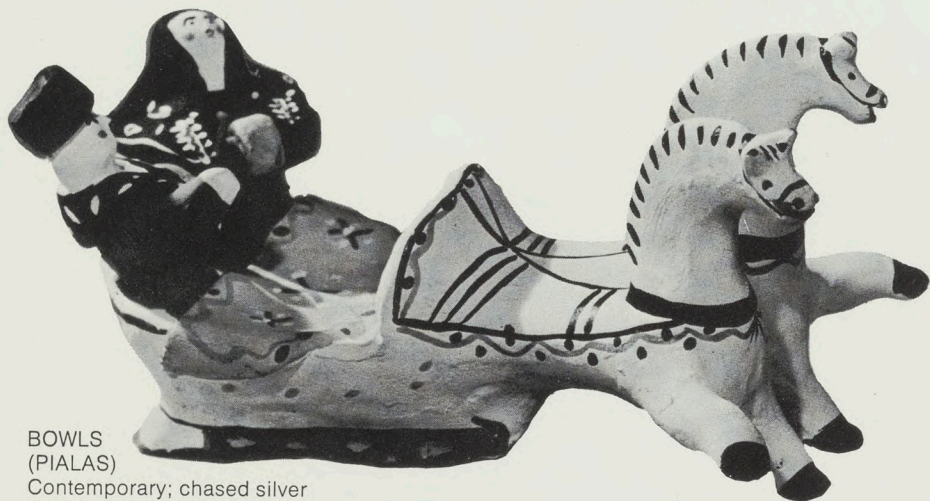
Since ancient times, embroidery has played a leading role in Russian, Georgian and Ukrainian folk art. Articles of clothing, table cloths, towels, curtains and other items were decorated with homespun linen or woolen threads. Artisans of the tzars, princes and boyars were supplied with expensive gold, silver and silk threads, as well as with pearls and precious stones, but the

embroidery itself was usually done in the spirit of pure folk art—simple, stylized floral designs with subtle additions of gold and silver details, mythical birds and beasts on dark backgrounds.

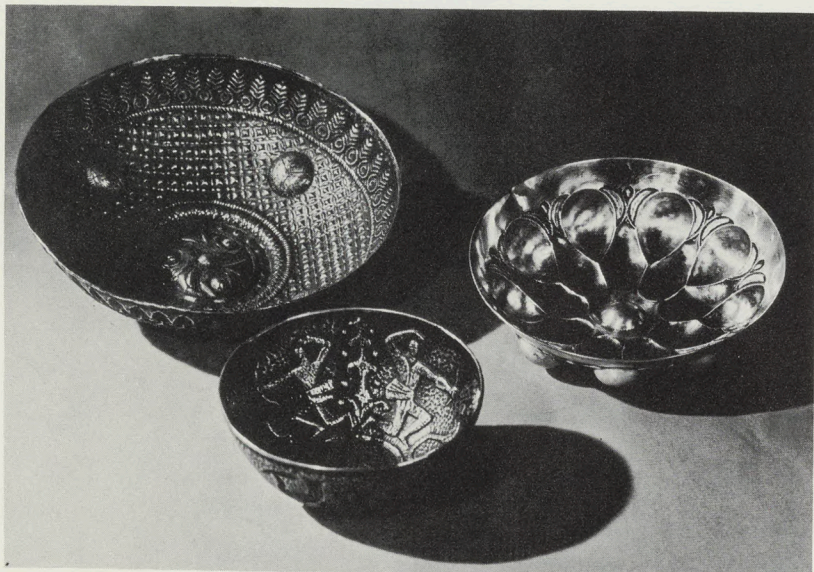
Quite different was the needlework intended for use in the churches. It was more closely associated with the art of portrait painting. It is hard to believe that the artisans used needles and threads and not paints and brushes. They knew precisely how to create a complex multi-figured composition with a distinctive color range of silk threads, stained with natural dyes. Precious imported pearls were used in the embroidery of articles intended for the court and the church, while the small pearls which abounded in the rivers of the



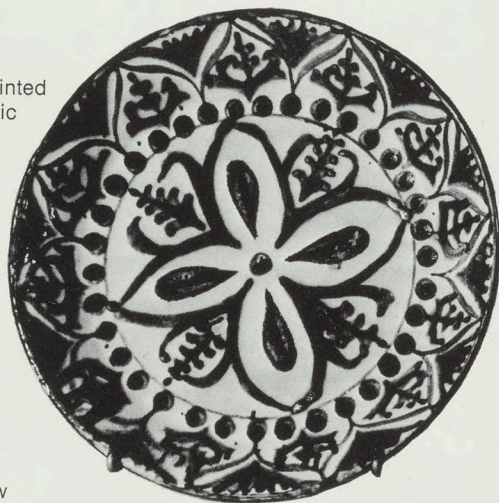
TOYS  
Contemporary; clay, baked and painted  
a. "Bay Horses" by Klavdia Sheveliova  
b. "Centaur" by Uliana Babkina  
Kargopol, Arkhangelsk Region



BOWLS  
(PIALAS)  
Contemporary; chased silver  
By Golodse Goderdzy  
State Art Gallery, Tbilisi, Georgian SSR



DISH  
(flower motif)  
Contemporary; painted  
and glazed ceramic  
Tajik SSR



JUG  
(KVASNIK)  
18th Century; majolica  
Gzhel  
State History Museum, Moscow





North were used for embroidering designs on women's headwear as well as for earrings and necklaces.

The art of bone carving, long known in Old Russia, is also related to the north. Archaeological excavations in Novgorod and Pskov uncovered various small items from the 9th to the 13th Centuries made from walrus tusks and from fossilized mammoth tusks—knife handles, combs, chessmen and ornamental plates with open-work carving. Later, the range of items made from bone broadened to include small chests and boxes and even articles of furniture.

Stone, bone and wood were used in Old Russia in another special field of art—in miniature sculpture and in fine relief carving of icons. This art, which became

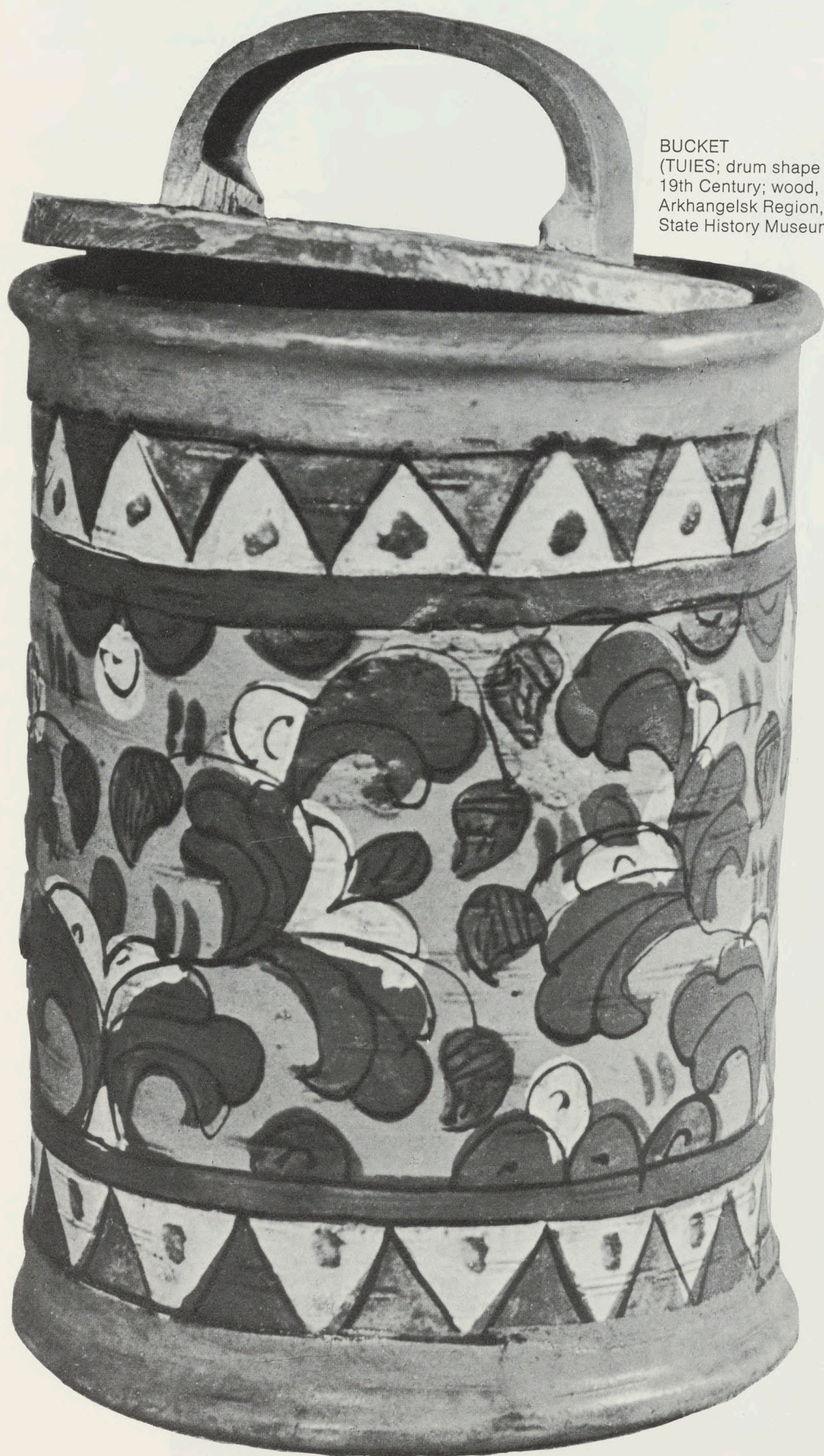
widespread, has no immediately eye-catching qualities; it demands close examination. In iconography, as in the carving itself, local stylistic characteristics can be distinguished.

For example, there was a large group of stone icons associated with 13th to 15th Century Novgorod, devoted to the theme of "The Lord's Sepulcher," with sturdy, stocky figures standing before a tomb; whereas, the miniature sculpture of 15th Century Moscow, influenced by the great artistry of Andrei Rublev, is distinguished by its elegant, calm and graceful silhouettes.

In the 16th Century, wood almost completely replaced stone as the material used for carving. Complex compositions began to appear, with large groups of figures shown against architectural backgrounds.

In the 17th Century, when bright ornamentation and broad color ranges appeared in all art forms, the production of brilliantly colored tiles flourished. In Russia, these tiles were used to decorate houses, while in the Ukraine, tiles were being manufactured for stoves which, besides having a practical function, were also intended to provide interior decoration. The tiles were covered with relief ornamentation or amusing pictures and inscriptions.

Old Russian engravings were another art form closely related to that of tiles and decorated spindles. These were wood cuts of bold, contrasting colors, which were appealing folk pictures with



BUCKET  
(TUIES; drum shape with cover)  
19th Century; wood, birch-bark  
Arkhangelsk Region, North  
State History Museum, Moscow



FIGURE  
1968; chamotte glazed, wood  
By Nelly Sazhina, Kishiniov  
USSR Ministry of Culture



BOWL  
1966; porcelain  
By Vladimir Gorodetski, Leningrad  
USSR Ministry of Culture

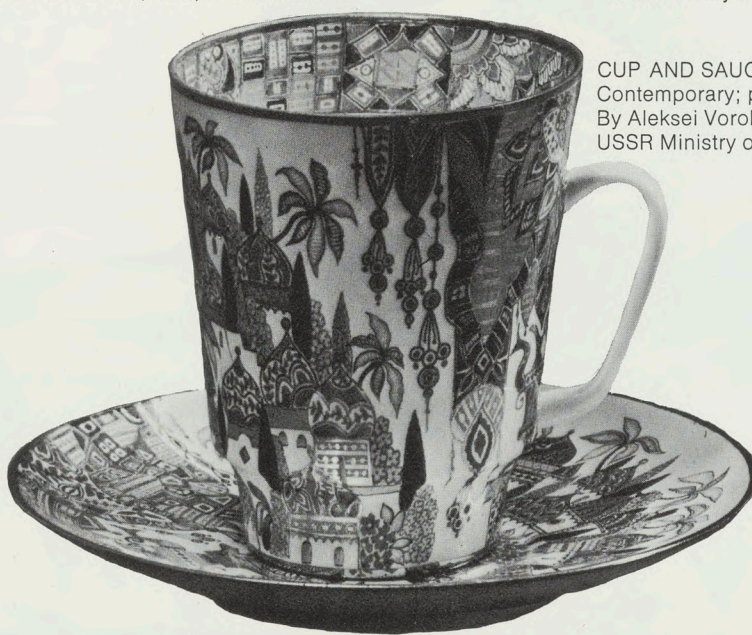
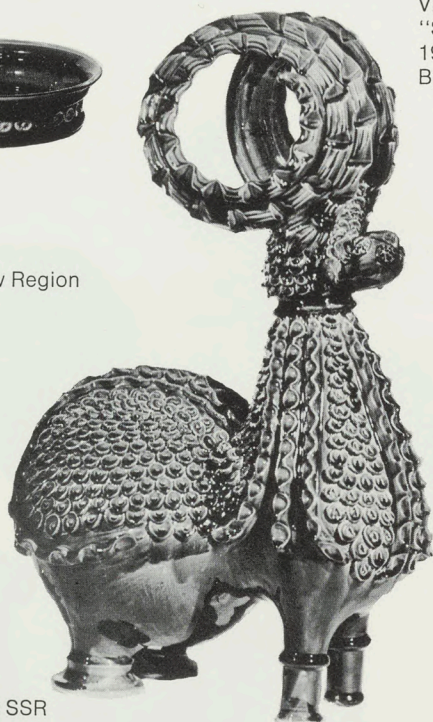


VESSEL  
"Sheep"  
1969; majolica  
By Dimitri Golovko, Kiev, Ukrainian SSR

TILES  
(stove)  
17th—18th Century; glazed clay  
Russia  
State History Museum, Moscow



DECORATIVE SET  
"Hamered"  
1969; painted porcelain  
By Peter Leonov, Duliovo, Moscow Region



CUP AND SAUCER  
Contemporary; porcelain  
By Aleksei Vorobievski, Leningrad  
USSR Ministry of Culture

TAPESTRY  
Contemporary; hand-woven wool  
By Rudolf Kheimrats, Riga, Latvian SSR  
USSR Ministry of Culture





DECORATIVE OBJECTS  
Contemporary; wood, carved and inlaid  
By Vasily Gaurish, Ukrainian SSR



VESSEL  
Contemporary; majolica  
By Pavlina Tsvilik  
Ministry of Culture, Uzbek SSR



VASE  
"Bouquet"  
Contemporary; crystal glass engraved  
By Adolf Ostroumov, Leningrad  
USSR Ministry of Culture



GALA BOWL  
(YENDOVA)  
18th Century; wood carved and painted  
Arkhangelsk Region, North  
State History Museum, Moscow





texts depicting maxims, folk sayings, folk tales, impressions of a magical outside world, or perhaps rollicking satires on the fashions and manners of the times.

The creative genius of folk artisans, treating black and colored metals with cold and hot forging, casting and minting, turned ordinary articles into works of art. Hammered iron brackets for lamp-lights were made in the form of intricately intertwining vines. Beautiful fairy-tale flowers of iron were designed to hold the hot sticks of burning wood used to light peasants' homes in the dark winter evenings. Lacy designs of wrought-iron graced the braces of small wooden chests and coffers used for

valuables. Heavy-duty, utilitarian copper utensils with hammered patterns, brightly polished surfaces and graceful shapes, also served as decorations for the home.

Jewelry-making occupies a significant place in the cultural history of the Soviet peoples, too, and is closely related to the folk art traditions technically developed by many generations of artisans.

In each republic of this vast land, the approach to the form, design and craft of jewelry-making is unique. The precision and delicacy of Georgian chasing which flourished in the 11th and 12th Centuries has been widely acclaimed. The ornamentation of finely-wrought metal and turquoise jewelry made in the mountain villages of Dagestan are challenged by the still brighter earrings

of Central Asia. Armenian jewellers are renowned for skillful metal work, such as very fine silver lace decorated with bright spots of enamel. The Ukrainian enamels of the 17th Century, used to decorate wrought metals, were distinguished from those of Moscow of the same period by their luxurious pigmentation and by the addition of the shade of lilac to their color schemes. Also unique were the short, wide Ukrainian goblets and the long spoons decorated with niello.

The Russian gold and silver utensils—almost completely circular pitchers with peaked lids and boat-shaped ladles—had the same calm graceful lines, the same logic and utility as did the wooden



JUG  
18th Century; majolica  
Gzhel  
State History Museum, Moscow



TRAY  
"Tea Drinking"  
Contemporary; oil and lacquer on metal  
By Nikolai Mozhaev, Zhostovo, Moscow  
Region  
USSR Ministry of Culture



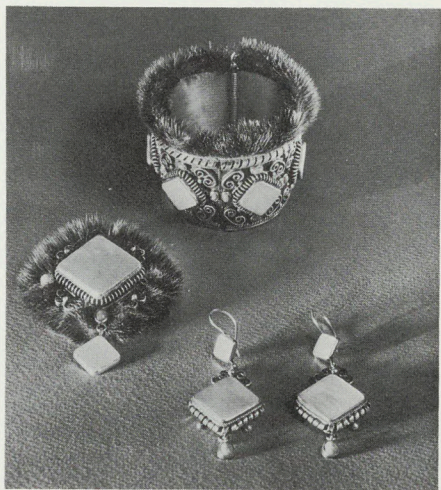
VASES  
1970; colored cut glass, sand blast  
By Liubov Savelieva and Fadahl  
Ibragimov, Moscow  
USSR Ministry of Culture



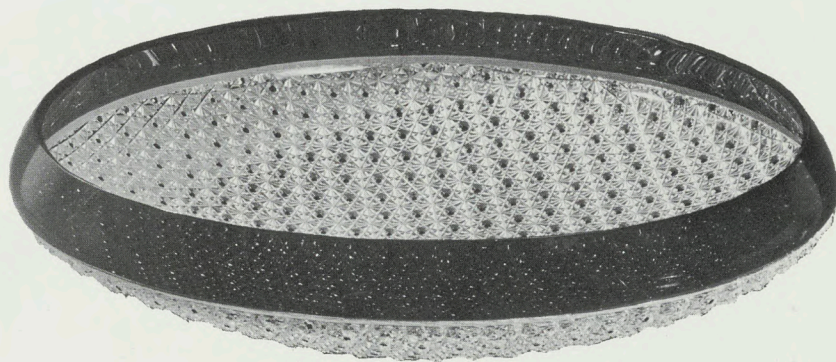
and ceramic utensils, whose shapes they copied. The preciousness of the materials gives an aura of refinement and delicacy, but gold or silver cannot conceal the inherent qualities of folk art. These can still be observed in the application of vividly colored enamels, in the balance of figures and designs, and in the fortuitous combination of realism and fantasy.

Soviet applied art, as well as the entire Soviet art industry, is closely linked with the best traditions of ancient folk art. Today's artists continue to develop, reflecting the great achievements of the past in response to current conditions and demands.

M. Postnikova  
Director of Arts  
State Historical Museum



JEWELRY SET  
1969; silver, mother-of-pearl, fur  
By Jutta Pass-Alexandrova, Leningrad  
USSR Ministry of Culture



BOWL  
Contemporary; colored cut glass  
By Vladimir Filatov, Guss-Khrustalni  
Ministry of Culture, Russian Federation



BOWL  
"Lively Water"  
Contemporary; blown colored sandwich  
glass  
By Ludmila Shushkanova and Dimitri  
Shushkanov  
USSR Ministry of Culture, Moscow



Contemporary folk decorative art of each of the numerous nationalities in our country is many-sided and diverse. Among an endless variety of objects of art made by Soviet craftsmen, the most interesting and original are handmade carpets (both pile carpets and tapestry ones), patterned felts, mats, embroidery, hand-woven articles, bobbin-woven lace, jewelry, decorative dishes, silver and other metal tableware, ceramics, clay toys, carved and painted wood, and clothing. They all charm by their distinctive national characteristics, the authenticity of feeling that is found in handmade objects, and their high standards of craftsmanship.

Much of the folk craft is produced by artists united in small cooperative organizations that have common workshops situated in the traditional centers of handicraft in the Soviet Union. Folk art objects are also made by craftsmen who work at home but receive their materials and orders and market their products in an organized way.

Some folk handicraft is made by craftsmen for their own family use or for their neighbors—an ancient tradition, especially in rural areas. Examples of these are felts made in many areas of the Caucasus and Central Asia, patterned stockings, wedding clothes and bridal jewelry. Their shape, ornamentation and color arrangement is fixed by tradition. In some homes one can see, side by side, newly made objects and very old



DECORATIVE OBJECTS  
Contemporary; ceramic (painted baked clay)  
Balkhar Aul (Village)  
Daghestan Autonomous Republic

PLATE ATTACHMENT  
(depicting an eagle carrying a hare)  
5th Century B.C.; gold, silver  
Greek-Scythian Art; North Caucasus  
Semibrathny Barrow, Taman  
Hermitage Museum, Leningrad







heirlooms, kept because of their great decorative value and artistic perfection.

In handicraft industries that operate mostly for the community, the artistic traditions develop more intensely than they do when the worker is making articles for his or her own domestic use. In cooperative ventures new types of articles and methods of artistic treatment appear more frequently.

After the Revolution, the art of old Russian icon-painting in the villages of Palekh and Kholui (the Ivanovo region) and Nistera (the Vladimir region)—the

traditional centers of this artifact—gave rise to the art of lacquered miniature painting on papier-mâché boxes. The new craft has retained and developed the splendid aesthetic and technical approach of the old painting with its use of gold drawing, some measure of its iconography, sensitivity to color arrangements, and the delicate relationships between painting and surface. The subject matter and the imagery have, of course, changed.

Fedoskino lacquered miniature painting from the Moscow region, which is the earliest Russian miniature painting, came into existence in the late 18th Century. First, it was an imitation of oil painting on canvas, executed on small papier-mâché boxes, cigarette cases, powder boxes, and the like. This technique has been preserved up to the

present. In the course of time, some new and original decorative techniques have been added, such as "transparent painting"—applying the paint over a metallized background or perhaps mother-of-pearl which produces a remarkable brightness of color that seems to glow from within, an effect achieved by glazing. Fedoskino miniature painting has acquired great individuality and diversity of subject matter. The subjects reflect the concerns of the miniature painter. Today, only a minority of the craftsmen producing miniatures copy canvas paintings in their work.

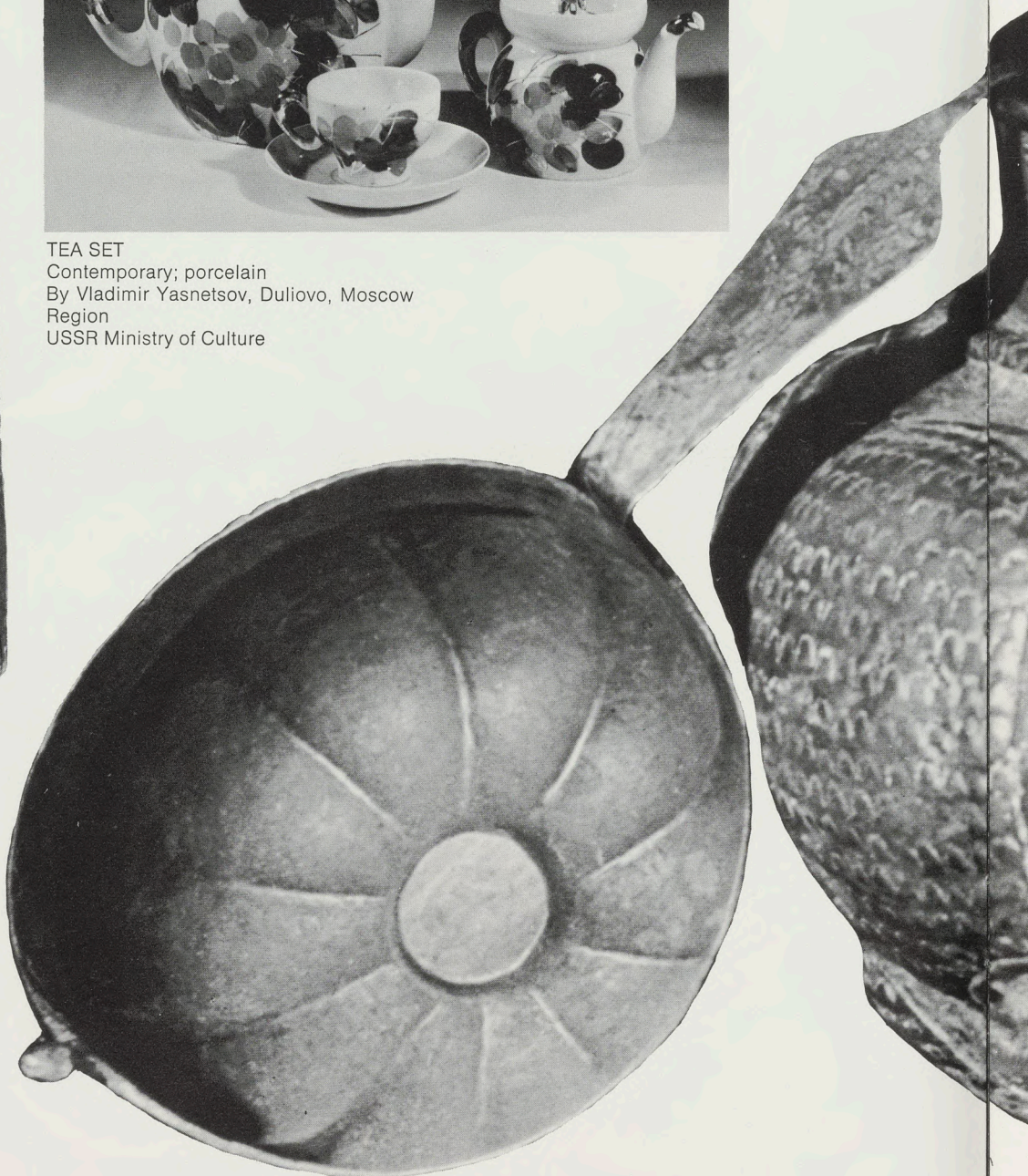
Metal trays decorated with oil paintings are still in everyday use in homes as well



**DISTAFF**  
19th Century; wood carved and painted  
Vologda, North  
State History Museum, Moscow



**TEA SET**  
Contemporary; porcelain  
By Vladimir Yasnetsov, Duliovo, Moscow  
Region  
USSR Ministry of Culture





as public buildings. With free and masterly brush strokes the craftsmen paint bouquets and flower garlands, revealing their poetic feeling for the natural beauty of their country and their fine sense of decoration.

Khokhloma handicraft dates back to the late 16th Century and was further developed during the 18th and 19th Centuries. It features carved and painted wooden spoons as well as peasant wooden tableware, and is found all over Russia today. Khokhloma handicraft is widely known, too, in the form of basins and saucers of different shapes and sizes which are used as biscuit dishes, sugar bowls, and fruit bowls. Moreover, these artisans make gift sets of special dishes for fish, soup, salad and pancakes, and small furniture such as tables and chairs, stools, decorative



BOWL  
(KORCHIK) WITH LADLE  
17th Century; red copper, cast and tinned  
State History Museum, Moscow



vases and scoops. Contemporary Khokhloma articles are distinguished by their predominately golden color and their beautiful floral decorations, and, while diverse in appearance, are elegant.

Skillful peasant women of the Vologda, Yelets, and Ryuzen regions make splendid bone lace by hand. Each of the regions has its own artistic style which preserves local traditions. The articles manufactured are large decorative curtains, panels, tablecloths and other pieces for interior use as well as for trimming for women's dresses.

The jewellers of the Daghutun village of Kubachi in the Caucasus were famous in the past for making spectacular arms decorated with etching and chasing and with gold and carved bone inlay. Today they specialize in making metal tableware, vases, dishes, and women's jewelry.

Carpet-making by hand flourishes in its traditional centers—in the Caucasus, in Central Asia, in the Ukraine, in Moldavia and other republics of the Soviet Union. Richness and diversity of pattern and high quality of fabric is especially striking in the Turkmen, Armenian and Azerbaijan pile carpets, the Ukrainian kilims, the Daghestan tapestry, and the Kirghiz, Kazakh and Georgian felts.

Local characteristics have been retained to a great extent. On the other hand,

outstanding artistic personalities have initiated bold experiments that have gradually influenced the evolution of the craft as a whole. The Turkmen, for example, make traditional ornamented carpets but have also created new, story-telling carpets, retaining the traditional decorated surface quality and rhythmical arrangement of the ornamentation of the carpet.

Ceramics, fashioned by hand on a potter's wheel, painted, color-glazed or decorated with plaster relief, have preserved much of the original local styles in almost every Soviet republic. The typical pottery of Central Asia includes pilaf dishes, green tea and

JUG  
(SATIL)  
19th Century; metal engraved  
Azerbaijan  
State Museum of Fine Arts, Baku



ICON  
(Prophet Elijah and the fiery chariot)  
14th—15th Century; egg tempera on  
wooden panel  
Pskov School  
State History Museum, Moscow



TOY  
(woman with buckets)  
Contemporary; clay, baked and painted  
with tempera and gold leaf  
Dimkovo Village  
Kirov Region





"koumiss" (mare's milk) bowls. The favorite articles of the Ukrainian craftsmen in Kiev and in the Poltava region are statuette vessels, lions, rams, ring-shaped "kumanets," and bowls used for "kvass," wine, and for decorative purposes. Gutsulshina (the Western Ukraine) has developed its own type of ceramics, tiles and crockery with painted scenes, and with yellow and green floral ornaments on a white background.

An echo of ancient Mycenaean culture (Crete) can be found in the harmonious shapes of vessels with sharp outlines and refined painting made by the talented craftsmen following the traditions of their fathers in the village of Balkhar (Daghestan). At the same time one can see the direct reflection of contemporary life in their sculpture.

Much has been done lately in our country to encourage craftsmen and to organize them into special workshops that have been established in a number of republics of the U.S.S.R.

Numerous government expeditions are being sent to regions that used to be centers of handicraft in order to assess their present productivity and to explore the prospects for their economic and artistic development. As a result of this effort a good many long-forgotten kinds of handicrafts are being revived.

These explorations reveal a great, seemingly inexhaustible supply of vitality and

a great national wealth of creative energy. New works, remarkably fresh in the artistic treatment of a variety of materials, diverse in form, are being created for utilitarian (tableware, toys, clothes, household linen, and tapestry) and decorative uses (statuettes, vases, and panels of various sorts).

Today new relationships are being formed between professional artists and native craftsmen. Numerous teams of highly skilled craftsmen are being developed and encouraged. Many craftsmen are members of the Artists' Union. The titles of the Honored Artist of the Republic, the Honored Art Worker, and the People's Artist are being conferred on them, and the Repin State



SBEETEN-POT  
(a type of samovar)  
18th Century; copper  
State History Museum, Moscow

DECORATIVE SCULPTURE  
1968; chamotte, reduced glazing  
By Ripsime Simonian, Yerevan,  
Armenian SSR  
USSR Ministry of Culture





Prize is awarded to quite a few craftsmen for extraordinary creative work. The master craftsman in our country is held in high esteem by his fellow citizens.

Exhibitions of work of individual artists are frequently arranged in order to encourage creative activity of all master craftsmen.

Some who will one day join that company serve their apprenticeships, individually and in groups, in workshops under experienced experts. But most of the training is conducted in specialized trade schools—each artistically significant trade having a school of its own. The course of training is usually two or three years (in the case of

complex skills, such as lacquered miniature painting, it may be four years). The training of young people is supervised by the best specialists in the trade and follows an approved curriculum. Besides professional training, pupils in the trade schools and colleges acquire a general knowledge of art (drawing, painting and composition) that enables them to continue studying for a fine art career if they choose to do so. Arts and craft colleges and some other higher learning institutions also train specialists to work in the area of handicrafts.

Thus, artists previously not engaged in a special trade may assimilate its tradition in a natural, non-scholastic way by working in it over a long period of time.

Organized handicraft industries may display great constancy in shape and

imagery. The Dymkovo clay toys (Kirov region), the Filimonovo toys (Jula region) and the Bogorodsk carved wooden toys (Moscow region), for example, can be regarded as a form of decorative sculpture, but in shape and ornamentation they have retained stylistic features dating back from at least the 19th Century or even earlier. Their charm lies in their portrayal of people of a bygone period. Today, the exaggerated treatment of images and vividness of shape and color passed down by succeeding generations of craftsmen have come to be regarded as classical.

Craftsmen organized in cooperative workshops, as well as those working at home, frequently make unique pieces:



TAPESTRY  
Contemporary  
By Danute Kvetkevichute, Vilnius  
Ministry of Culture, Lithuanian SSR





these are usually intended for special art competitions that are periodically held in all the republics, or are made to order for offices and institutions, to enrich the interiors of new buildings, such as hotels, cafes, restaurants, convalescent homes, and kindergartens. Ordinary articles of handicraft may be manufactured in small numbers or in fairly large editions as in the case of such objects as "matryoshkas," wooden and earthen tableware, carved and clay toys, embroidered skullcaps. In the process of mass production, extensive use is made of the individual methods of local artist-craftsmen, who may be especially talented in the areas of modelling, carving, painting, weaving or etching. Because of this selective process, all handmade objects are unique in that they have absorbed the experience of many generations yet also depend for

their creation on the spontaneous personal feeling of the craftsman who produces them.

The growing exportation of these articles helps to make them and their types familiar to a great number of folk art lovers in many parts of the world.

Contemporary Soviet folk art, with its great variety, is developing on the basis of equality and friendly cooperation of the many national cultures of the peoples that make up our country. Folk decorative art is an important part of contemporary art in the Soviet Union.

O. Popova, M.A.  
Arts and Crafts Research  
Institute of the RSFR

APPLIQUE RUG  
Contemporary; thick felt  
By Balatai Sadvokasova  
Museum of Fine Arts, Alma-Ata,  
Khazakh, SSR



FINIAL  
(griffin's head holding stag's head)  
5th—4th Century B.C.; wood, gold  
Scythian-Altai Art  
Pazyryk Barrow, Altai  
Hermitage Museum, Leningrad



BOX  
"Winter Landscape"  
1969; papier-mâché, lacquer  
By Michael Chizhov, Fedoskino, Moscow  
region  
Folk Arts Museum, Moscow

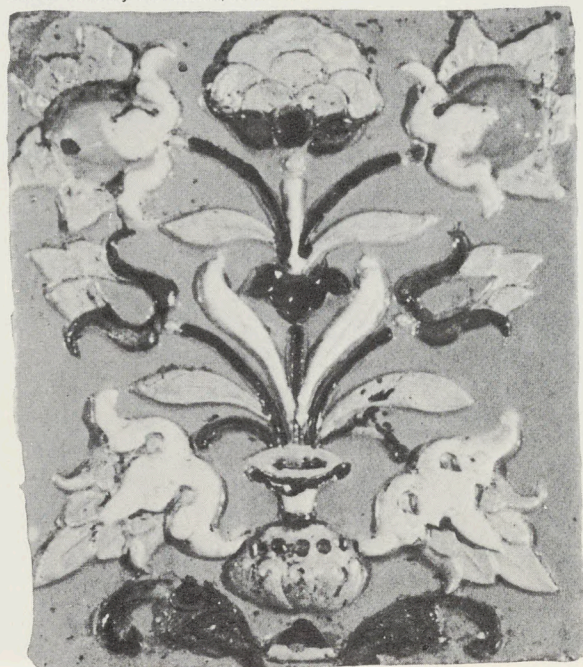




SAMOVAR  
Early 19th Century; copper  
State History Museum, Moscow

CHALICE  
(CHASA)  
17th Century; silver, enamel  
Solvichegodsk, North  
State History Museum, Moscow

TILE  
(for exterior decoration)  
17th Century; glazed clay  
State History Museum, Moscow





Decorative and applied arts in the Soviet Union are held in great esteem; they are a vital part of contemporary culture.

Soviet decorative art has numerous and varied uses. Monumental works—stained glass panels, tapestries, theater curtains, ceramic panels and metal grills, are integrated into the architecture of Palaces of Culture, theaters and libraries. Along with painted panels and sculptured reliefs, these works create an emotional atmosphere conveying high patriotic feelings while depicting modern society.

Decorative art is truly a part of daily life, enriching hotels, cafes and restaurants and other public buildings; meanwhile, individuals continue to express their personal tastes at home.

Some of the distinctive features of recent Soviet decorative art are vivid imagery, emotional expressiveness and the ability to harmonize with surrounding architectural space.

At the same time decorative and applied arts used in factories create conditions that help raise the efficiency and good spirits of the workers. Good design is important in plant equipment, machine tools, and all aspects of life, at work and at home.

Soviet decorative art is deeply rooted in the traditions of folk art of the past and is inspired by its imagery; yet it is always in

search of the new. It is based on artistic systems and principles that have been used by gifted craftsmen for centuries—by potters, woodcarvers, glass blowers and weavers.

Decorative and applied arts are spread all over the vast territory of the multinational Soviet Union. All Soviet Republics take pride in their country's splendid creative achievements in art and literature. The national and therefore highly diverse cultures of the peoples that are united in the fraternal family of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics share its Socialist philosophy, and are all imbued with the spirit of socialist construction and the common concern for the good

FACADE DECORATION →  
(detail from peasant cottage)  
19th Century; carved wood  
Gorky Region  
State History Museum, Moscow













BOWLS AND LADLE  
Contemporary; chiselled wood, oil,  
lacquer, painted  
Khokhloma, Gorky Region  
Folk Arts Museum, Moscow



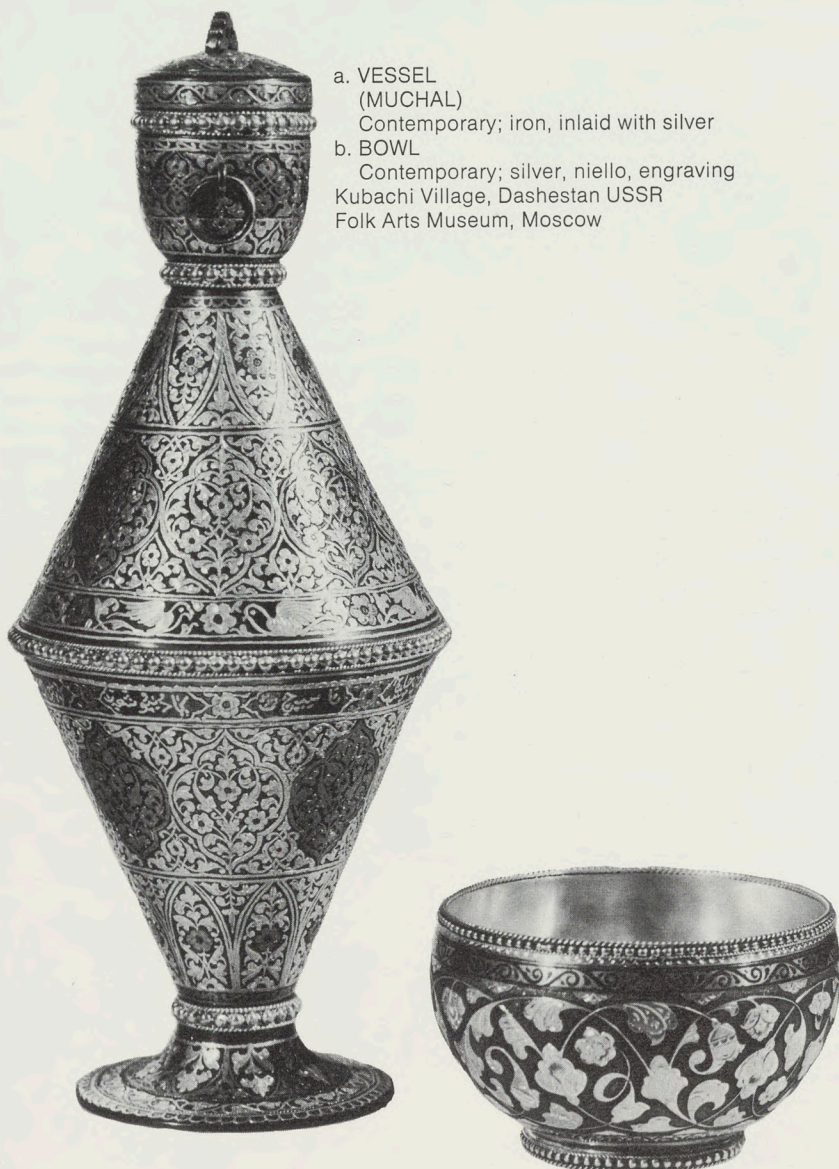
ICON  
(St. Boris and St. Gleb)  
15th Century; egg tempera on wood panel  
Moscow  
Tretiakov Art Gallery, Moscow



METAL PANEL  
1970; chased copper  
By Kukury Guruly, Tbilisi, Georgian SSR  
USSR Ministry of Culture



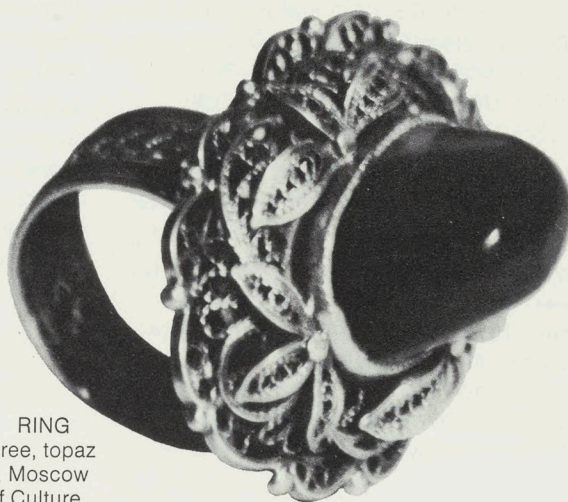
a. VESSEL  
(MUCHAL)  
Contemporary; iron, inlaid with silver  
b. BOWL  
Contemporary; silver, niello, engraving  
Kubachi Village, Dagestan USSR  
Folk Arts Museum, Moscow







JUGS  
Contemporary; ceramic (blackware)  
By Metreveli Revaz, Tbilisi  
USSR Ministry of Culture



RING  
1971; silver, filigree, topaz  
By Yuri Saveliev, Moscow  
USSR Ministry of Culture

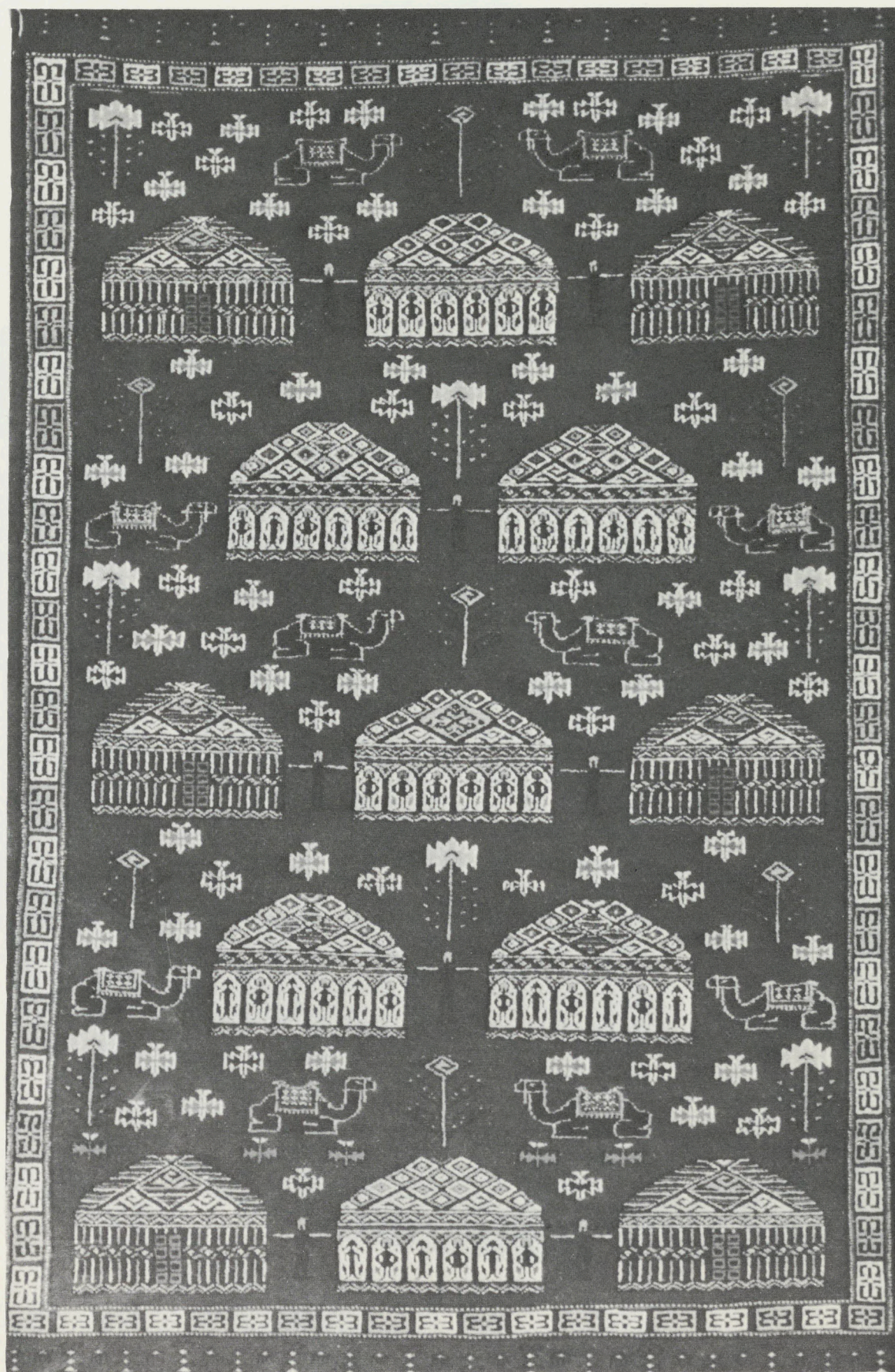


TAPESTRY  
(national dance motif)  
1967; hand-woven wool  
By Anri and Gaiko Gakharia, Tbilisi  
Academy of Fine Arts, Georgia SSR



FIVE-PIECE TEA SET  
1970; porcelain  
By Evgeni Smirnov, Verbilki, Moscow  
Region  
Ministry of Culture, Russian Federation

PLAQUE  
Contemporary;  
wood, painted  
By Taisia Voronetskaya,  
Leningrad  
USSR Ministry  
of Culture



CARPET  
"Village"  
Contemporary  
By Jovsi Shakhberdieba, Turkmen, SSR



and prosperity of our great multi-racial Motherland.

The intensive development of national idioms in the decorative and applied arts of all of the peoples inhabiting the Soviet Union is a feature of the present stage of socialist culture. Even in the republics which before the October Revolution had neither artists nor artistic industry, decorative and applied arts sometimes reach masterful heights and have become a valuable component of Soviet art.

Nowadays in every republic of the Soviet Union, in many autonomous regions,

folk craftsmen work side by side with professionally trained artists. Some of them work at glassworks, in porcelain or ceramic factories, or in textile mills. They supervise the artistic quality of production, design crockery, household articles, upholstery fabric and other textiles for mass consumption.

Some craftsmen work in the workshops of the Artists' Union and some in their own studios.

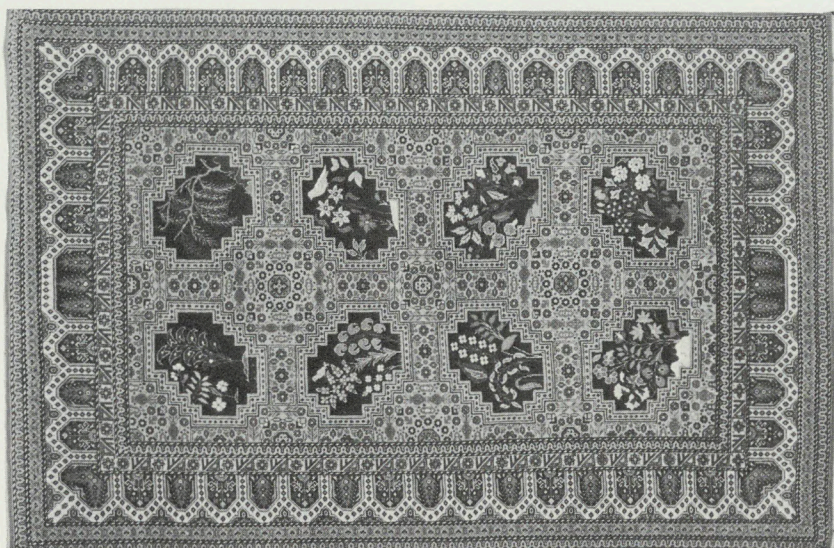
While engaged with the everyday activities of producing articles on a mass scale, the majority of artists also experiment widely, searching for new techniques, new means of artistic expression. In this spirit they often create monumental works synthesized with archi-

tectural units. The significance of these works lies in the force of their plastic expression, perhaps in the beauty of their forms, or in the unusual artistic ideas they embody. Here Soviet decorative art finds its maximum expression.

In different republics and regions different branches of the decorative arts prevail. New artistic styles, schools and trends are being built on the basis of the indigenous cultural heritage.

CARPET  
"Spring"

Contemporary; wool, hand-made  
By Liatif Kerimov  
State Museum, Baku, Azervaidjan SSR



BOWL  
(KOVSH; bird-boat shape with pointed  
prow and crooked handle)  
1624; gold, niello, precious stones and  
pearls  
Made for Tzar Michael Fedorovich  
Romanov, by Ivan Danilov, Popov and  
Afanasy Stepanov  
The Kremlin workshops, Moscow  
The Armory, Moscow





In the Russian Federation, porcelain, faience and majolica are the most popular forms of applied art. Porcelain of the Leningrad plant established in the 18th Century is renowned for fine drawing, exquisite painting and accuracy of detail. Massive, sumptuously painted porcelain of the Dulevo plant (the biggest in the vicinity of Moscow) follows traditions of old hand-painted Russian crockery.

Majolica of the Konakovo plant (the Kalinin region) has luxurious forms and freely arranged floral patterns. Recently Russian artists have produced most interesting articles in glass and crystal on the basis of the old technique of "diamond faceting" and blowing, infinitely varied in technical methods and style. Such approaches to this wonderful

material display its ever-new expressive and decorative potentialities.

Common metals, decorative stones, and glass enrich one another in Russian jewelry, combining to form genuine works of art.

The Ukraine has every right to be proud of its majolica—open bowls, dishes with rich floral design, unusual figurine vessels, and highly decorative lions and rams glittering with green and brown glaze. Manufacture of story-telling

carpets and tapestry with melodious linear rhythms and a fine purity of colors has a simple folk origin.

Glass of the "Neman" plant, in Byelorussia, is renowned for its high quality revealing a subtle understanding of the material.

The young artists in Minsk, capital of Byelorussia, have begun to produce ceramics based on the patterns of local folk pottery.

In Moldavia ceramics and tapestries are the most interesting kinds of applied art. Traditional methods of pottery-making,



SOUVENIR TOYS  
(doll and animal)  
Contemporary; straw  
By Evgeny Loss  
Byelorussian, SSR



DISTAFF  
19th Century; wood carved  
and painted  
Zaonezhie, North  
State History Museum, Moscow



WINE BOWL  
(KOCHOB), with two handles decorated  
with birds)  
17th—18th Century; silver, cast and  
smithed  
Georgia  
State History Museum, Moscow



local design and choice of subjects—among them weddings, rural festivals, lyrical scenes and folk dances—result in a product with a special flavor of its own. The quest persists for new forms and imagery in articles executed in the traditional technique of black smoked ceramics.

In Armenia the making of sculpture and decorative vases of coarse ceramic is widely developed. Their monumental proportions and rough surface, enriched by lustrous glazes and by soft grey and brownish tints, remind one of traditional Armenian stone architecture and of the plastic forms of their ancient pottery. Another aspect of their local culture is revealed in pieces of Armenian jewelry with their highly decorative quality and exquisite elegance. Armenian jewelry is

made to harmonize with local native costume, which is the basis for those adornments growing from folk art.

Georgia contributes handsome black ceramics to national pottery—monumental wine vessels, solid bowls, complex compositions wherein the functional shape of the vessel is in perfect harmony with relief figures of goats, rams, and oxen. They most beautifully fuse the poetic tradition of festivals and merry feasts with modern rhythms and proportions.

The tapestry surface of Georgian craftsmen is austere and restrained; at the

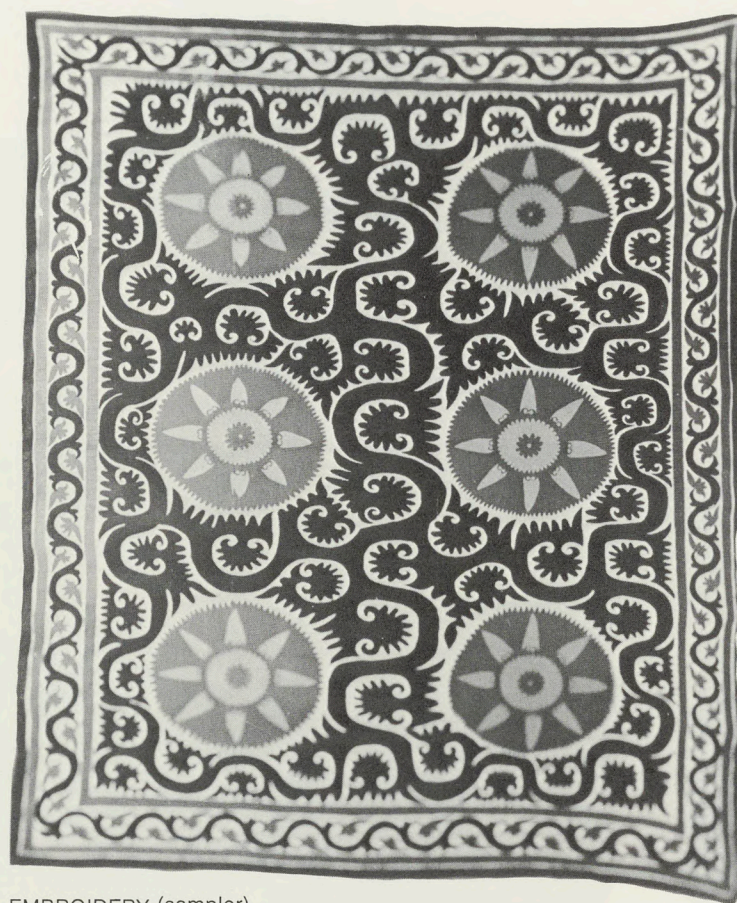
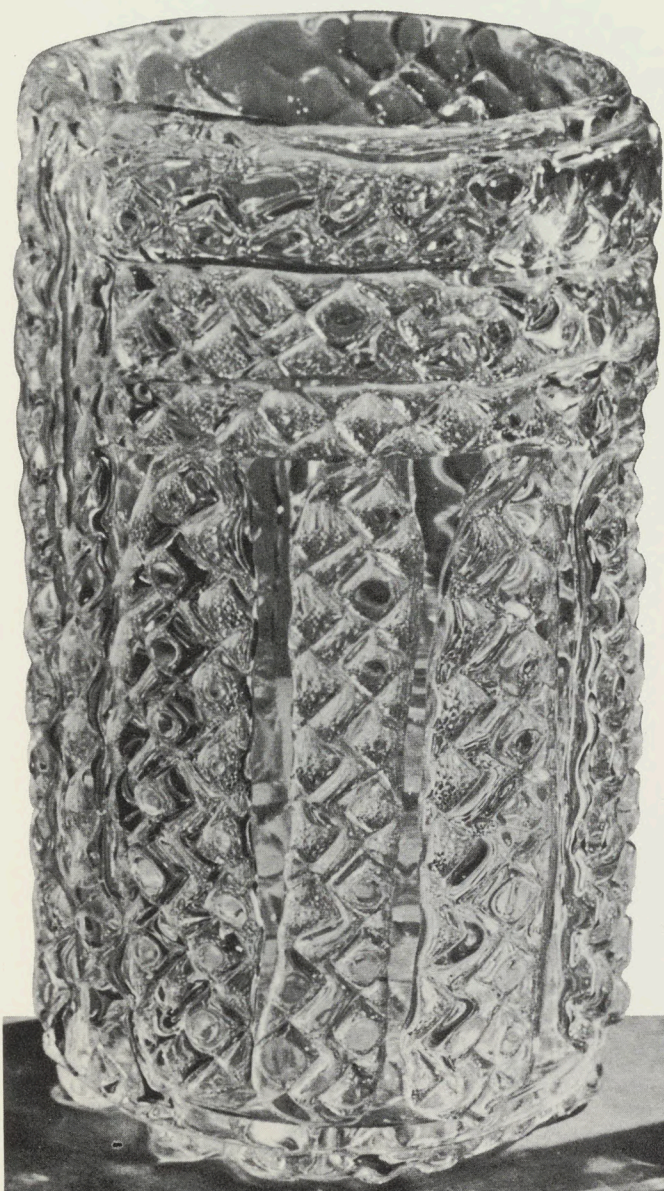
same time it is dramatic and violent in line and color. It demonstrates a highly developed feeling for decoration coupled with psychological, interpretive insight. The genius of the Georgian people finds expression in chased metal reliefs that constitute a great and valuable branch of national decorative art.

Decorative arts of the Central Asian Republics preserve especially close links with their native traditions. Manufacture of pile carpets, felts, embroidery in tambour stitch, wicker-work and painted pottery find logical development in the work of modern artists.

In the Soviet Baltic Republics, many and varied kinds of decorative art are pursued. In Lithuania ceramics and tapestry

#### VASES

1971; colored blown glass  
By Galina Antonova, Moscow  
USSR Ministry of Culture



#### EMBROIDERY (sampler)

1960  
By Suzani  
State Art Museum, Dushanbe, Tadjik SSR

#### SHAWL

(flower motif)  
Late 18th Century; embroidered  
with gold threads  
North Russia  
State History Museum, Moscow





red  
ow





prevail among the applied arts. Vases of austere shape and chandeliers of stone are known far beyond the borders of this republic. Lithuanian artists, expert in handling the kiln, reveal the special decorative qualities of the materials they use; their processes of manufacture deliberately leave streaks of glaze, cracks, and indications of the potter's wheel on the finished piece.

Lithuanian tapestry reflects the varied world of nature in vivid imagery. Thick forests, valleys of flowers, ships at sea, festivals, meetings and partings, are some of the themes in their art. Special distinction is achieved in Lithuania's story-telling and ornamental tapestry by

the use of many methods of weaving, by combining different methods, and by using wool with other fabrics and even with metal.

In Latvia, production of ceramics is also wide-spread. This art preserves hereditary links with the traditional pottery of Latgale, an ancient center of folk ceramics. They have specialized, too, in the development of the ornamentation of leather. Latvian artists skillfully obtain diversity in the surface texture of leather, which apart from effects of relief may be smooth or mottled, shiny or dull in surface. They combine leather with other materials, too—wood, metal, amber, and sometimes with fur.

Latvian carpets and tapestry reveal the artists' urge to experiment and further

research their craft. Many of their articles show sophistication of color, the subtle rendering of light effects, and the search for psychological expressiveness. Many of their tapestries have physical depth in relief forms with a suggestion of volume.

In Estonia, ceramics, carpet and tapestry weaving, and leather work are highly developed crafts. Here, too, metal-ware deserves special attention. Relief panels and decorative plaques reveal the expressive potentialities of the materials with which they have been worked. Some pieces emphasize the glitter and hardness of the metal; others, its suppleness and plasticity. Some pieces are brilliant; others, dull; and a great variety



CARPET  
Contemporary; wool, hand woven  
By Nadezhda Babenko  
Ministry of Culture, Ukrainian SSR



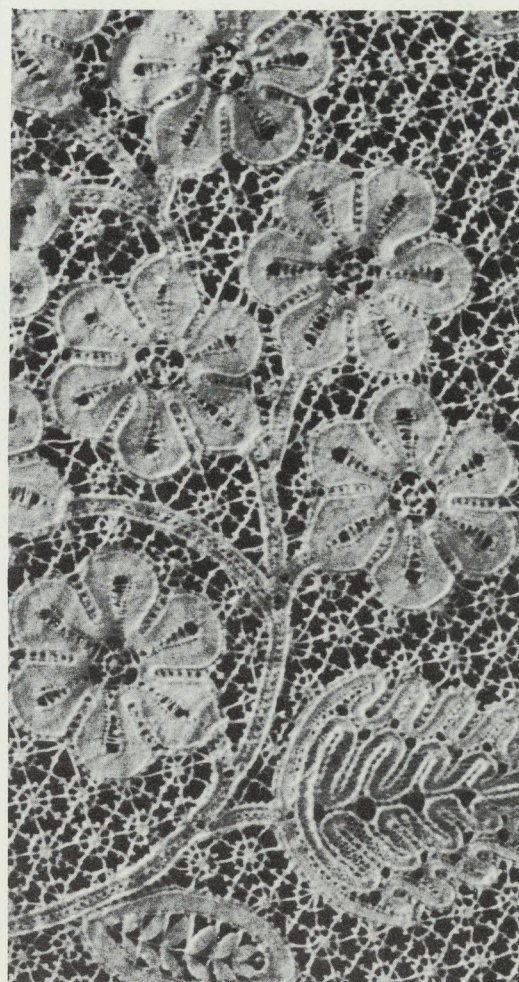


RUG  
 "Host of Mountains"  
 Contemporary; wool, felt  
 By Jumabai Umetov  
 State Museum of Fine Arts, Frunze,  
 Kirghiz SSR



BOWL  
 (KOUSH-SKOBKAR; bird-shaped scoop)  
 19th Century; carved and painted wood  
 Arkhangelsk Region, North  
 State History Museum, Moscow

CURTAIN  
 "Lilac"  
 1966; hand-made lace  
 By Anna Korabliova, Vologda region  
 Folk Arts Museum, Moscow





of color is obtained by expert manipulation of temperature control in its manufacture.

Estonian glass is characterized by simplicity and austerity of form and beautiful smoked tints of color.

These three republics produce notable jewelry—in Lithuania and Latvia, often made of a unique material: amber. The ability of the Baltic masters to bring out the peculiar qualities of this material and highlight its decorative character is revealed at its height.

These are the most typical and important aspects of contemporary decorative and applied arts of the Soviet people, an important part of the life of the people, reflecting their ideological strivings and artistic tastes.

In all branches of Soviet decorative applied arts, one feels the lively and passionate interest of the artists contributing to the national culture, their zeal for the creation of a new Soviet tradition and for the further development of contemporary art.

This exhibition can not give a full picture of the wealth and variety of contemporary decorative and applied arts in the Soviet Union. Its task is much more modest: to show the level of Soviet culture in the folk idiom through the work of a number of the outstanding artists of the USSR.

We hope the exhibition will arouse interest in the decorative and applied arts of the peoples of the Soviet Union and will stimulate a desire on the part of those seeing it to become better acquainted with the variety and inexhaustible wealth of such art in that country.

L. Kryukova, M.A.  
Research Institute of the  
USSR Ministry of Culture



DECORATIVE SET  
"Spring Flowers"  
Contemporary; blown sulphide glass  
By Victor Shevchenko, Diatkovo,  
Briansk Region  
Russian Federation



PANEL  
"Brides"  
1968; chased copper  
By Salme Raunam, Tallinn, Estonian SSR  
USSR Ministry of Culture





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SOVIET UNION:  
ARTS & CRAFTS IN ANCIENT TIMES & TODAY  
1972

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FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, CHICAGO

BOSTON MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK CITY